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USAGE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS: PERCEPTIONS AND OPINIONS OF RUSSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Abstract: This paper presents the results of the study aimed at identifying Russian students' opinion with regard to social networks and their place in people's life. The main findings of this study are: more than half of the respondents rated social networks very positively, Russian students really like them. Even those who do not like social networks periodically use them. The majority of respondents use social networks a few times a day and spend online from one to two hours. The most frequently visited and most popular social networks are VK, Instagram and YouTube. The most important functions of social networks for Russian students are communication, sharing photos and videos, learning and exchanging information. However only a small part of the respondents knows how their personal information is used in social networks. These results have raised the important problem, emphasizing the fact that people do not think about how social networks protect their personal information.

Keywords: social networks, communication, survey, university students, Russia, Internet privacy, security, personal information.

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ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ СОЦИАЛЬНЫХ СЕТЕЙ: ВОСПРИЯТИЕ И МНЕНИЕ РОССИЙСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ

Аннотация: В данной статье представлены результаты исследования, направленного на изучение мнений студентов российских университетов о социальных сетях и их значимости в жизни людей. В результате данного исследования были получены следующие выводы: более половины респондентов положительно относятся к социальным сетям и даже те, кто не любит социальные сети, периодически их используют. Большинство российских студентов посещают социальные сети несколько раз в день и проводят там от одного до двух часов. Наиболее посещаемыми и популярными социальными сетями среди респондентов являются VK, Instagram и YouTube. Среди важнейших функций социальных сетей российские студенты выделяют: общение, обмен фотографиями и видео, обучение и доступ к различной информации. Однако лишь очень малая часть респондентов имеет представление о том, как социальные сети обрабатывают и используют их личные данные. Полученные результаты подняли важную проблему, подчеркнув тот факт, что люди редко задумываются о собственной безопасности в Интернете и социальных сетях.

Ключевые слова: социальные сети, общение, опрос, исследование, студенты, Россия, конфиденциальность в интернете, безопасность, персональные данные.

1. Introduction

Social networks have become one of the most important parts of our lives. The recent study shows that 60% of adults using the Internet are registered in at least one social network [1], [2], [5]. People spend an

enormous amount of time on social networks, which allows users to voluntarily publish personal information, send and receive messages, stay in touch with their «offline» friends, share photos, videos, join groups, and make new friends. Social networks provide many opportunities for users to facilitate their socialization.

However, people do not think about what huge amounts of personal information they publish on social networks. Studies show that most people do not know how social networks collect and process their confidential information [3].

The purpose of this article is to find out the attitude of Russian students to the usage of Social networks and their awareness about privacy on Social networks.

To achieve this goal, the article solves the following tasks:

- explore the usage of Social networks by Russian students;
- find out the opinion of respondents about various Social networking websites;
- determine the reasons of using Social networks by Russian students;
- examine the information about privacy and security on Social networks.

2. Method and Procedure

To obtain statistical data the study was conducted in the form of an online survey. The questionnaire included 13 different questions. It was completed by 138 university students. Of these, 82 are from the Ural Federal University, 34 from the Ural State University of Economics and 22 from the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. According to sex, 78 / 56.6% of girls and 60 / 43.5% of boys participated in the study. According to the level of the educational programme, 102 / 73.9% of the students were enrolled in the master's degree and 36 / 26.1% entered the bachelor's program.

For the processing and analysis of research data, statistical analysis software called Deductor and Microsoft Excel were used.

3. Research questions

3.1 The Frequency of Using and the Time Spent on Internet

Analysis of the question «How often do you use the Internet?» showed that even 126 / 91.3% of students use the Internet several times a

day, 9 / 6.5% – once a day, only 3 / 2.2% – several times a week, and none of the students every two weeks or less.

It is useful to know the average time students spend on the Internet during one visit (Table 1).

Table 1 – Time spent on the Internet (N/%)

| Time | N | % |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| Less than 10 minutes | 2 | 1.4 |
| From 10 to 30 minutes | 11 | 8.0 |
| From 30 minutes to 1 hour | 30 | 21.7 |
| From 1 to 2 hours | 42 | 30.4 |
| From 2 to 3 hours | 29 | 21.0 |
| More than 3 hours | 24 | 17.5 |
| Total | 138 | 100 |

It can be seen that 42 / 30.4% of respondents spend from one hour to 2 hours on the Internet during one visit, 30 / 21.7% – from half an hour to one hour and 11 / 8.0% – from ten to thirty minutes. 29 / 21.0% of respondents spend from 2 to 3 hours on the Internet and 24 / 17.5 – more than three hours. Since most students use the Internet several times a day, this means that young people spend quite a lot of time on social networks.

3.2 Frequency of using Social Networks

As for the question «How often do you visit social networks?». The analysis showed that 114 / 82.6% of respondents visit them at least several times a day, 12 / 8.7% – at least once a day. Only a small part visits the Internet several times a week or less (Table 2). To the question «What is the average time you spend on social networks during one visit?» 64 / 46.4% of respondents stated that from ten minutes to half an hour and 30 / 21.7% less than ten minutes.

Table 2 – Frequency of use of social networks

| Visiting frequency | N | % |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|
| A few times a day | 114 | 82.6 |
| Once a day | 12 | 8.7 |
| 1-3 times a week | 9 | 6.5 |
| Less | 3 | 2.2 |
| Total | 138 | 100 |

Compared with the time spent on the Internet as a whole, it is possible to think that students often use the Internet only because of social networks. Students were asked if they liked social networking sites. Data analysis showed that the majority of respondents (89 / 64.5%) really like social networks and willingly use them. 35 / 25.4% of respondents partly like social networks, and only 14 / 10.1% dislike them (Figure 1).

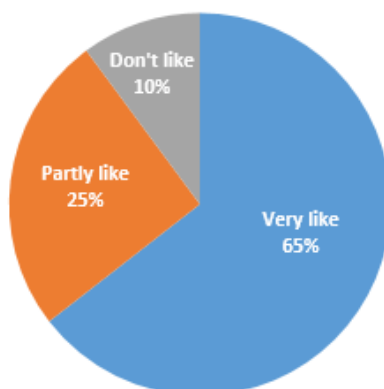


Figure 1 - Attitude to social networks

3.3 Usage of Social Networks

The total number of 9 social networking sites, known to researchers, was presented in the questionnaire, and respondents were asked how often they used in them. Nine social networks that are visited by Russian students are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 – Russian students about the usage of social networks:
frequency of use (N / %)

| Social networks | Daily | | Once a week | | Once a month | | Less than once a month | | Do not use | |
|------------------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|--------------|------|------------------------|------|------------|-------|
| VK | 135 | 97.8% | 1 | 0.7% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 1.4% |
| Instagram | 104 | 75.3% | 18 | 13.0% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 16 | 11.6% |
| YouTube | 77 | 55.8% | 24 | 17.4% | 12 | 8.7% | 3 | 2.2% | 22 | 15.9% |
| Facebook | 36 | 26.1% | 11 | 8.0% | 4 | 2.9% | 2 | 1.4% | 85 | 61.6% |
| Twitter | 17 | 12.3% | 8 | 5.8% | 10 | 7.2% | 5 | 3.6% | 98 | 71.0% |
| Google+ | 6 | 4.3% | 3 | 2.2% | 5 | 3.6% | 5 | 3.6% | 119 | 86.2% |
| Tumblr | 5 | 3.6% | 3 | 2.2% | 2 | 1.4% | 1 | 0.7% | 127 | 92.0% |
| Mail.ru My World | 1 | 0.7% | 1 | 0.7% | 0 | 0% | 2 | 1.4% | 134 | 97.1% |
| Odnoklassniki | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 1 | 0.7% | 1 | 0.7% | 136 | 98.6% |

The most visited social networks: VK, Instagram and YouTube. All other social networks are rarely visited, and not all respondents

used them, but there is no a social network, unknown and not used, at least by several respondents. On these Internet resources, each consumer can create their own profile, make friends and communicate in interesting groups, and so on.

3.4 Social Networks Functions

Respondents were asked to evaluate the functions of social networks in accordance with their importance to them. 10 functions were presented, and they were asked to rate using a 5-point rating scale from 1 - absolutely unimportant to 5 - very important. According to the importance, functions are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 – Students' opinion about the importance of social networks functions (N = 138)

| | Functions | Value | SD |
|----|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| 1 | Communication | 4.40 | 1.13 |
| 2 | Sharing photos, videos and so on | 3.95 | 1.11 |
| 3 | Learning and exchanging information | 3.52 | 1.17 |
| 4 | Friend search | 3.22 | 1.21 |
| 5 | Chatting | 3.05 | 1.36 |
| 6 | Spending leisure time | 2.92 | 1.32 |
| 7 | Conversations in groups | 2.58 | 1.20 |
| 8 | Advertisement | 2.24 | 1.21 |
| 9 | Online games | 2.12 | 1.11 |
| 10 | Flirting | 1.87 | 1.10 |

The most important functions are: communication (value = 4.40, SD = 1.13), sharing photos, videos and so on (value = 3.95, SD = 1.11), learning and exchanging information (value = 3.52, SD = 1.17) and searching friends (value = 3.22, SD = 1.21).

Among students are also popular chatting, (value = 3.05, SD = 1.36), spending leisure time on the Internet (value = 2.92, SD = 1.32) and conversations in groups (value = 2.58, SD = 1.20). Not a big part of the respondents admires online games (value = 2.12, SD = 1.11) and flirting on the social networks (value = 1.87, SD = 1.10) got the lowest evaluation.

3.5 Students' Opinion about Social Networks

22 statements were presented in the questionnaire about social networks and respondents were asked to evaluate them. Also, participants were asked to evaluate the statements using a 5-points ranking scale from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The results of the evaluation are presented in a decreasing order of mean values in Table 5.

Table 5 – Opinion of Russian students about social networks

| | Statements about social networks | Value | SD |
|----|---|-------|------|
| 1 | Communication in social networks will never substitute direct people's relationships | 4.37 | 1.03 |
| 2 | Social networks are a very good communication tool | 4.11 | 0.97 |
| 3 | Social networks are a good opportunity to learn various news | 4.04 | 0.92 |
| 4 | You can find a lot of useful information in social networks | 3.82 | 0.86 |
| 5 | Most people using social networks do not know with whom they share information about themselves, their hobbies and life | 3.61 | 0.88 |
| 6 | Social networks make a lot of money using free personal user information | 3.54 | 0.89 |
| 7 | Social networks provide national and international knowledge | 3.48 | 0.78 |
| 8 | Social networks have a negative impact on learning and the ability to concentrate | 3.39 | 0.94 |
| 9 | Social networks distract people from real life | 3.22 | 0.87 |
| 10 | Social networks help make new friends | 3.18 | 0.92 |
| 11 | This is a good opportunity to learn, improve yourself and communicate with the whole world without leaving home | 3.11 | 1.03 |
| 12 | Social networks are a good way to relax | 3.05 | 0.81 |
| 13 | Social networks are a good way to spend your free time | 2.98 | 0.94 |
| 14 | Social networks save time and allow you to more efficiently distribute your time | 2.93 | 0.79 |
| 15 | Information transmitted by social networks can have a negative impact on the behavior and health of adolescents | 2.77 | 0.81 |
| 16 | Constantly staying in a virtual environment is detrimental to human socialization | 2.63 | 1.02 |
| 17 | Communication in social networks gives more opportunities | 2.61 | 0.88 |
| 18 | Social networks are good for those who do not know what confidentiality of information is | 2.45 | 0.95 |
| 19 | Social networks encourage the alienation of people from reality | 2.28 | 0.98 |
| 20 | Social networks dehumanize society | 2.12 | 0.84 |
| 21 | Social networks are mainly used by people with low levels of education | 2.01 | 1.04 |
| 22 | Social networks can encourage young people to commit suicide | 1.88 | 1.06 |

Students really believe that communication in the virtual space will never replace the direct relationship of people (value = 4.37, SD = 1.03). In their opinion, social networks are a very good communication tool (value = 4.11, SD = 0.97), and social networks are a good opportunity to study various news (value = 4.04, SD = 0.92). Negative features of social networks are also underlined: the majority of people using social networks do not know with whom they share information about themselves, their hobbies and life (value = 3.61, SD = 0.88), social networks distract people from the real life (value = 3.22, SD = 0.87), and social networks have a negative impact on learning and ability to concentrate (value = 3.39, SD = 0.94). However, students do not agree that social networks are mainly used by people with a low level of education (value = 2.01, SD = 1.04) and doubt whether social networks can encourage young people to commit a suicide (value = 1.88, SD = 1.06).

It was interesting to know the respondent's opinion about people who use social networks. Participants were asked to rate 4 statements about people who tend to use social networks, using a 5-point rating scale from 1 – totally disagree with 5 – fully agree. The results of the evaluation are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 – Students about people who tend to use social networks

| People who tend to use social networks are | | Value | SD |
|---|--|--------------|-----------|
| 1 | Enjoying communication | 4.20 | 0.77 |
| 2 | Enjoying new technology | 4.15 | 0.73 |
| 3 | Looking for something new | 3.56 | 0.80 |
| 4 | Having communication problems in real life | 3.20 | 1.12 |

Another question relates to the relationship between the usage of social networks and the improvement of respondents' communication skills. The answers showed that only 34% of respondents firmly believe that the usage of social networks improves their communication skills (Figure 2). The largest percentage – 55% believe that social networks partly improve their communication skills, and 11% believe that the usage of social networks does not affect on their communication skills.

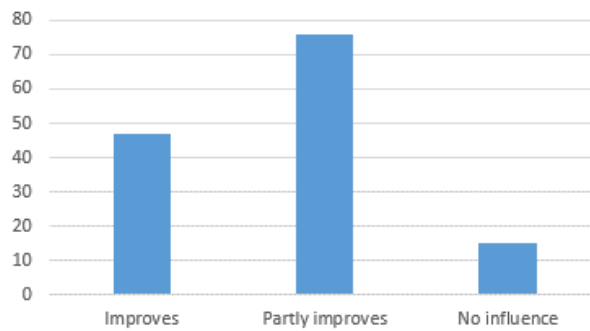


Figure 2 – The influence of the use of social networks to improve communication skills

3.6 Personal Information Used By Social Networks

Respondents were asked whether they know how social networks use their confidential information. The results are shown in Figure 3.

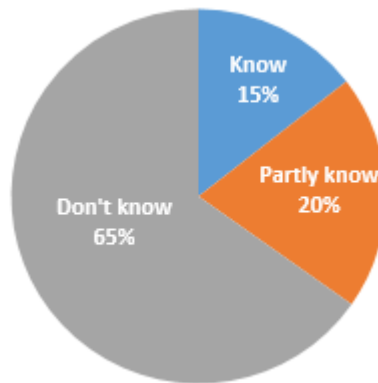


Figure 3 – The level of knowledge about how social networks use personal or other type of information published by users

The answers showed that only 15% of respondents know how social networks collect and process their personal information, 20% partly know, and most of them (65%) do not know where and how their information is used. And this problem is one of the most negative aspects of social networks in particular, and the Internet as a whole.

4. Conclusion

Social networks have become an important part of people's daily lives. They were designed to enable people to interact with those who they are already familiar in real life but are located at a distance from each other. However, now social networks are also an effective tool for finding new friends in different parts of the planet. People turn to them because they are an effective way to communicate and get information.

Analysis of the data shows that the majority of respondents use the Internet several times a day and spend online from one to two hours

daily, more than half of them visit social networks several times a day as well. Thus, it is obvious, the usage of the Internet and social networking sites are closely and directly interrelated.

In this article, we have found that almost half of the respondents rated social networks very positively, they really like them. Only a small part of students does not create their personal profile in social networks.

The most frequently visited and most popular social networks among Russian students are VK, Instagram and YouTube. The most important functions of social networks for them are communication, sharing photos, videos, learning and exchanging information, friend search and chatting.

Although social networks were rated as an excellent means of communication, a great opportunity to learn different news and find new friends, students firmly believe that virtual communication will never replace the real relationships of people [4].

Students really believe that social networks improve their communication skills and just make their lives easier.

However, Russian students have little knowledge of how personal information is used in social networks. The issue of confidentiality and security raised an important question, emphasizing the distrust of users to the way how their personal data is processed in social networks.

Thus, the final goal of the work is achieved, the attitude of Russian students to social networks was studied, and raised an important problem, emphasizing the distrust of users in how their personal data is collected and processed in social networks. Indeed, these findings are confirmed in G. Udo's study [6] which shows that privacy protection is the biggest problem for Internet users.

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